

Illinois Lawmakers React To State of the Union Address

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Illinois' senior U.S. Senator says he supports President Bush's call for less dependence on foreign oil and further research into alternative energy sources.

Dick Durbin's comments came after the president's sixth State of the Union address Tuesday night.

The Democrat called the energy initiative a "worthy bipartisan goal."

Many other Illinois lawmakers' reacted to Tuesday night's speech along expected party lines.

Democratic U.S. Senator Barack Obama says Bush talked about important issues, but didn't offer serious proposals to call America to action.

Meanwhile, Republican Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert praised the president's call for the U.S. to remain on the offensive in the war on terror.

Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky panned the President's State of the Union Address, saying it held "nothing of hope" for the vast majority of Americans.

"It demonstrates just how out of touch this President is," she said.

The Evanston Democrat said that the President's call for less of a dependence on oil rings hollow, calling him the "pusher in chief," and saying that he is too closely tied to oil interests to provide anything more than lip service to the development of alternative fuels.

"He may talk about it but there's very little in the budget...that would support research into alternatives and to conservation," she said. "It's really just a meaningless statement."

Likewise, she also questioned Mr. Bush's commitment to competitiveness in the 21st Century, when the House is scheduled to vote Wednesday on a measure that she says would cut \$11 billion in funding from student loan programs.

Schakowsky said the president's health care proposals are "a step in the wrong direction."

She said health care spending accounts are useful only for wealthier Americans, said the President should work to curb spiraling health costs and said government needs to find alternatives that would get more people access to health insurance.

Hastert says he thinks the highlight was the President's commitment to prevail in Iraq and the fears he voiced about Iran's nuclear program.

The Speaker said the mood among his constituents favors extension of the Patriot Act and the surveillance program made public in recent weeks.

He was pleased to hear the President's call to make recent tax cuts permanent. Hastert said he also was pleased to hear the President's call to work toward energy independence, and said the government need not pay for alternative fuels research. He said he

spoke with leaders of the American Petroleum Institute Tuesday, and urged them to dedicate a sizable portion of oil company profits to alternative fuel research and production.

North Shore Congressman Mark Kirk says he wishes the President had spent a bit more time on domestic initiatives in the address. While he says he was pleased to hear the President promote more portable health insurance and training for a new generation of math and science teachers, he says he wishes the President had proposed more initiatives to fight street gangs, reduce mercury pollution in Lake Michigan waters, meet economic competition from China and India, and do battle against Internet pornography and child predators.

Republican State Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka was pleased with the olive branch that Mr. Bush extended to congressional Democrats. She says he was strident where he needed to be, on foreign policy issues and "standing up for freedom."

Northwest suburban Congresswoman Melissa Bean says she was pleased to hear the President address concerns she has about health care and gas prices and competition from India and China. She is also pleased that he wants to put better-trained math and science teachers into the nation's schools. But she says he should have offered incentives to small businesses and wanted to hear the President urge Congress to return to a pay-as-you-go system.

Representative Judy Biggert, a Republican, said "We have to stop thinking 'oil and gas' and start thinking 'nuclear, hydrogen, and other alternative sources' that our advanced technologies have made possible. Our future competitiveness relies on science and technology, and the president got it right tonight." -

Democrat Representative Jesse Jackson Jr.: "The truth on Iraq is that President Bush took us to war on deception and lies, continues to be less than candid on the costs of the war (materially, morally and diplomatically), and has arrogantly mismanaged it." -

"We have a health care crisis in this country. And I welcome any idea that will solve that problem here in Illinois. But I do not believe that the president offered that idea tonight," said Governor Rod Blagojevich.